

Message Text

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ACTION AF-08

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01
INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15
USIA-06 AID-05 IGA-02 PC-01 DHA-02 EB-08 MCT-01 IO-13
OMB-01 /099 W

-----240859 024240 /17

R 231609Z FEB 77

FM AMEMBASSY FREETOWN

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4910

INFO AMEMBASSY ABIDJAN

AMEMBASSY CONAKRY

AMEMBASSY DAKAR

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MONROVIA

C O N F I D E N T I A L FREETOWN 0685

LONDON FOR SEITZ

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS PINT SL

SUBJ: TRIBAL AND POLITICAL UNREST IN SIERRA LEONE

REF: (A) FREETOWN 652, (B) FREETOWN 602 AND OTHERS

1. SUMMARY: TRIBAL AND POLITICAL UNREST IS WIDESPREAD THROUGH-
OUT THE SOUTHERN AND EASTERN PROVINCES OF SIERRA LEONE, WITH
SOME EVEN PREDICTING A CIVIL WAR COULD ERUPT IF FREE AND OPEN
ELECTIONS ARE NOT HELD. TRADITIONAL SOUTHERN MENDE TRIBAL
ANTAGONISM TOWARD THE NORTHERN TEMNES, WHICH HAS BEEN AGGRAVATED
BY DETERIORATING ECONOMIC CONDITIONS AND POOR GOSL PERFORMANCE,
IS THE BASIS FOR RENEWED SIERRA LEONE PEOPLES PARTY (SLPP)
AGITATION AGAINST THE REGIME OF PRESIDENT STEVENS AND HIS NORTHERN-
BASED ALL PEOPLES CONGRESS (APC). IN THE WAKE OF WELL-ORGANIZED
VIOLENCE (REFTEL A), POLICE FORCES HAVE MANAGED TO RESTORE
SURFACE CALM TO MAJOR CITIES AND TRANSPORTATION ROUTES FOLLOWING
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STEVENS' ANNOUNCEMENT THAT ELECTIONS WOULD BE HELD IN APRIL
REFTELS). HOWEVER, THE LIKELIHOOD IS FOR SERIOUS AND EXTENSIVE
DISORDERS IN BOTH PROVINCES AT LEAST. END SUMMARY

2. DURING A FOUR DAY VISIT TO EASTERN PROVINCE CAPITAL OF KENEMA
AND SOUTHERN PROVINCE CAPITAL OF BO, EMBOFF HAD OPPORTUNITY TO
DISCUSS TENSIONS IN BOTH PROVINCES WITH KNOWLEDGEABLE SIERRA

LEONEANS AND LONG-ESTABLISHED EXPATRIATES AND TO OBSERVE LOCAL SITUATION. ALL OBSERVERS ATTRIBUTED THE UNREST SWEEPING BOTH PROVINCES TO THE GENERATIONS-OLD CONFLICT BETWEEN THE MENDE TRIBE IN THE SOUTH AND THE NORTHERN TEMNE, EACH OF WHICH CONSTITUTE ABOUT ONE-THIRD OF SIERRA LEONE'S POPULATION. THIS CONFLICT HAS BEEN EXACERBATED BY THE GENERAL ECONOMIC DECLINE THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY AND GOVERNMENT'S FAILURE TO COME TO GRIPS WITH SIERRA LEONE'S PROBLEMS. THE MENDES BLAME STEVENS AND HIS NORTHERN-BASED APC GOVERNMENT FOR THEIR ECONOMIC DIFFICULTIES.

3. THIS TRIBAL CONFLICT HAS BEEN MODERNIZED THROUGH THE INTRODUCTION OF POLITICAL PARTIES, THE APC BEING CONSIDERED THE TEMNE PARTY AND THE SLPP BEING THE MENDE PARTY. ALTHOUGH THE SLPP WAS DEFEATED IN THE 1967 ELECTION AND NOT ALLOWED EFFECTIVELY TO CONTEST THE 1973 ELECTION BECAUSE OF APC INTIMIDATION AND HARASSMENT, A SHADOWY UNDERGROUND NETWORK OF SLPP SUPPORTERS APPARENTLY CONTINUES TO EXIST IN BOTH PROVINCES. THE DESTRUCTION AND VIOLENCE IN BOTH PROVINCES LARGELY WAS DONE BY CHILDREN, BUT THEIR TARGETS OBVIOUSLY WERE CHOSEN BY ADULTS AND THE DEMONSTRATIONS WERE WELL ORGANIZED. APC PARTY OFFICES, HOMES OF APC MINISTERS AND PARLIAMENTARIANS AND APC SYMPATHIZERS, AS WELL AS GOVERNMENT OFFICES WERE DEMOLISHED. SIERRA LEONEANS AND OTHERS CLAIM THAT THE SLPP IN BOTH PROVINCES IS SUFFICIENTLY ORGANIZED THAT IT COULD FIELD CANDIDATES AND CONTEST PARLIAMENTARY SEATS IF ITS CANDIDATES WERE NOT SUBJECT TO GOVERNMENT PROTECTED APC HARASSMENT OR ARREST. IN RESPONSE TO THE QUESTION, WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF THE PRESIDENT DID NOT PERMIT FREE ELECTIONS, THE RESPONSE GENERALLY WAS THAT THE DISTURBANCES WOULD BECOME WORSE. SOME EVEN SUGGESTED THAT A CIVIL WAR COULD ERUPT.

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4. FOLLOWING THE PRESIDENT'S ANNOUNCEMENT THAT HE WOULD PROROGUE PARLIAMENT AND HOLD NEW ELECTIONS IN APRIL, POLICE REINFORCEMENTS WERE ABLE TO ESTABLISH A FACADE OF CALM IN BOTH PROVINCES. APART FROM SOME DAMAGED BUILDINGS, BOTH KENEMA AND BO APPEARED OUTWARDLY CALM AND THE MAIN HIGHWAY FROM KENEMA TO FREETOWN WAS UNOBSTRUCTED, ALTHOUGH MORE THAN THE USUAL NUMBER OF POLICE CHECKPOINTS WERE NOTED. IN THE EASTERN PROVINCE MANY SCHOOLS REMAIN CLOSED. IN THE SOUTHERN PROVINCE SCHOOLS WERE OPEN, BUT ATTENDANCE AT MOST WAS SAPRSE, AND MANY STUDENTS CLAIM TO BE AFRAID OF ARREST.

5. SOME SIXTY PROMINENT PERSONS IN BO WERE ARRESTED THE NIGHT OF FEBRUARY 16. WE UNDERSTAND THAT MOHAMMED SANUSI "PA MUSTAPHA", ONE OF TWO PRETENDERS FOR TITULAR HEAD OF THE SLPP, WAS AMONG THOSE ARRESTED. STUDENTS AT THE BO GOVERNMENT AND TECHNICAL SCHOOLS REFUSED TO ATTEND CLASSES UNTIL THEIR PRINCIPALS WERE RELEASED. ARRESTS WERE REPORTED ELSEWHERE, ESPECIALLY AMONG PRINCIPALS, TEACHERS, AND EVEN STUDENTS.

6. DESPITE THE CURRENT OUTWARD CALM IN BOTH PROVINCES THE POTENTIAL FOR SERIOUS AND WIDESPREAD DISORDER REMAINS. IF FREE AND OPEN ELECTIONS ARE HELD AS PROMISED THE SITUATION COULD NORMALIZE; OPEN ELECTIONS, HOWEVER, COULD BE THE BATTLEGROUND FOR FURTHER TROUBLES. ON THE OTHER HAND, IF THE APC RESORTS TO HARASSMENT AND INTIMIDATION TO PREVENT SLPP CANDIDATES FROM CAMPAIGNING OR IF THE POLICE ARREST SLPP NOTABLES, FURTHER UNREST AND DISORDERS ARE ASSURED.

7. WITH THE EXCEPTION OF THE RESIDENT LEBANESE COMMUNITY, WHICH IS ONE TARGET OF THE PRESENT UNREST, OTHER FOREIGNERS HAVE NOT BEEN HARASSED OR SUBJECT TO CRITICISM. SIERRA LEONEANS SEEM TO RECOGNIZE THAT THIS IS A SIERRA LEONEAN PROBLEM. AS A PRECAUTIONARY STEP, HOWEVER, THE EMBASSY HAS ACTIVATED ITS WARDEN SYSTEM AND PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEERS ARE BEING DIRECTED SPECIFICALLY TO AVOID ANY COMMENT ON OR INVOLVEMENT IN THE CONFIDENTIAL

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CURRENT POLITICAL SITUATION. SAMUELS

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Message Attributes

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